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After returning Monday from a three-week tour in Afghanistan as a Naval Reserve officer, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said more U.S. troops are needed soon to stabilize the war-torn country.

Even though the Highland Park Republican called recent U.S. military action across the Pakistan border "extremely aggressive," Kirk said the current multinational troop deployment is not enough to keep the country from reverting to pre-Sept. 11 Taliban rule.

"The other side still has way more guns than they ever did before," he said, who is entering his fifth term representing the North suburban 10th District. "It is a very robust environment."

Kirk says he is the only U.S. House member to serve as a reservist in a combat zone since World War II. He spent three weeks as a Naval intelligence officer in the southern region of Afghanistan over the holiday season.

He said he worked with locals, government officials and military personnel from several countries as part of a broader effort to stifle the Taliban's main source of cash - poppy seed production in the opium trade.

President-elect Barack Obama has called for a surge in U.S. troops in Afghanistan as operations in Iraq draw down. He said the international community is expecting the president to carry through with his word in the coming months.

In particular, he said the United Nations is expecting 25,000 more U.S. troops to be deployed in Afghanistan as other countries contribute about another 60,000.

"They see this as his big military mission," he told the Daily Herald editorial board Monday afternoon after a 40-hour trip back to his district.

The Bush Administration has counted on him in the past for help with the Iraq war, and his experience may be utilized by two military-related House committees if the Afghanistan conflict escalates.

On other foreign policy matters, he would not back international calls on Israel for a cease fire in the Palestinian territories as that conflict threatens to throw the Middle East into chaos.

"It is the height of chutzpah for Hamas to shell Israeli cities and then complain when Israelis come to clean house."

This article was edited to comply with Franking Commission guidelines.